

A Hope in the UNSEEN

RON SUSKIND

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Questions

SOCIOLOGY

Is Cedric's story a tale about the American dream?

What does Cedric's meeting with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas reveal about race and/or class as it relates to education in America?

Barbara Jennings struggles as a single parent. What special issues do you feel she faces in her situation? In general, what issues do single parents face in sending their children to college?

What role does the absence and presence of Cedric, Sr. play in Cedric's life?

Think about your college application process. Do you think students whose parents have not attended college are at a disadvantage in college admissions? How does Cedric's process in selecting and applying to a college compare with yours?

Is Cedric's story unique? What does it say about equal access to higher education in America?

EDUCATION

What does the summer experience at MIT teach Cedric about *his* education at Ballou High School?

Cedric's father is an educated man with two degrees. Is he a success?

Why is a college degree important? What does a degree in higher education demonstrate?

Embarrassed, Cedric went to great pains to hide his SAT score from his peers in the MIT Summer Program and at Brown. Is the SAT an accurate measure of a student's potential for academic success?

MULTICULTURAL/GENDER ISSUES

How does this book address the question of stereotypes?

Does Cedric face particular pressures in high school because he is male? Is there particular pressure on males *not* to succeed academically?

What does Cedric learn from Zayd Dohrn about "being white?"

What does Cedric learn from Chiniqua Mulligan about "being black?"

Judge Clarence Thomas tells Cedric "Try to say to yourself, I'm not a black person, I'm just a person. You'll find a lot of so-called multicultural combat, a lot of struggle between ethnic and racial groups – and people wanting to sign you on, to narrow yourself into some group or other. You have to resist that, Cedric. You understand?" (121) What do you think about Judge Thomas's advice?

How is the term “ghetto” used in the book?

As a black undergraduate in the early 1950s, Professor Ramsey says he “felt like some sort of black pioneer whom others would follow” (92). Do you see Cedric as a pioneer?

Is it fair to offer special consideration in the admissions process? If you were an admissions officer, to which, if any, of the following groups would you give special consideration? Children of alumni and/or donors? Athletes? Musicians? Ethnic minorities? International Students?

PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION

The title comes from Mr. Taylor, who misquotes the definition of faith found in the Bible. He says, “The substance of faith is hope in the unseen” (49). To what kind of faith is the title referring?

During Bishop Long’s last sermon before Cedric leaves for Brown, Long fears thoughts about “a belief in the sovereignty of self [that breaks] . . . the spell of absolute unquestioning faith . . .” (151). Later, after Thanksgiving dinner, Dr. Korb says Cedric “needs to find his place through reason, not faith, a place in the world of men, not just some imagined kingdom of heaven” (256). Does the definition of faith change in the book? How?

How does Cedric’s faith support him through his challenges? Are there ways in which his faith added to his challenges? Where are you finding support as you begin college? Do these supports bring challenges for you as well?

COLLEGE TRANSITION

What was the most important thing you brought with you to college?

What motivates Cedric to do well in school? What motivates you?

Cedric has fears about starting college. In what ways are his fears typical? In what ways are they unique?

How do you plan to communicate with your college professors?

Despite a promising beginning, Cedric and his roommate Rob develop a very rocky relationship. What are the factors that lead to this trouble? How might they have overcome their differences?

Toward the end of his first year at Brown, Cedric returned to Washington to speak at Alumni Day at Ballou High School. Cedric tells the assembly, “It’s hard to believe I’m saying this, considering what Ballou can be like, but in some ways, this is a shelter for you, a protection against some of the real obstacles to achievement, some of which are real and complicated. Once you get out there, you have to build your own protection” (266). What obstacles are you likely to encounter in your first year of college?

JOURNALISM

The author of the book, Ron Suskind, documented the rise and fall and rise of Cedric. At one point, when Cedric and his mother face imminent eviction, this writer could have easily stepped in to cover their monetary needs, but didn’t. Why not? What is the line between objectivity (reporting the story) and the ethics of compassion?

Why is it easy to imagine Cedric’s environment? Think about how the mass media – in particular, movies, television and music – portray ill-educated, poor African American men. What does this portrayal accentuate? What does it ignore?

Do you think Ron Suskind would have written this story if Cedric had only hoped to go to a community college? What aspects would have changed if he chose only to get *more* education rather than an *Ivy League* education?